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ABSTRACT

A results-based educational approach focuses on the outcomes of processes and inputs into the educational system and stresses results, such as student achievement, rather than process. The results-based educational reform initiatives undertaken in Alberta from 1982-1990 are described in this paper, with a focus on interrelated results-oriented projects developed in the areas of management, programs, and governance. A conclusion is that the shift to a results-based approach has created a more balanced policy, though problems in politics, communication, time and investment, and cooperation have hindered reform implementation. Implementation of results-based initiatives is predicted to accelerate because reform efforts are creating a new status quo that is open to innovation. Figures illustrate components of the Alberta reform movement, key events in implementation, and current and projected sources of reform initiatives. (17 references) (LMI)

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The Alberta Strategy for Educational Reform:

Balancing Inputs, Processes, and Results

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Paper presented as part of the symposium, "Indicators, Standards, and Strategies: Implications for Policy and Practice", at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 17, 1990.

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The Alberta Strategy For Educational Reform:

Balancing Inputs, Processes And Results

The perspective on educational reform presented in this paper represents the views of one of the initiators and designers of reform in Alberta Education. The views expressed are the author's observations of the reform initiatives during the period 1982 to April 1990.

Introduction

A major educational reform effort in Alberta started in the early 1980s. Reform was stimulated by the arrival of a new Deputy Minister of Education and a series of changes in the political, economic and social climate of the province. These events coincided with the publication of *A Nation at Risk (1983)* and other American reports on the status of education in the United States.

This paper describes the results-based component of the educational reform initiative in Alberta. After describing the context for education in Alberta, the paper outlines the general framework for reform in the province. Projects directed at enhancing the results-based component are described, with the focus on the interrelationships among these projects. Finally, observations on the status of implementation of reform in Alberta are presented.

The Alberta Context

In Canada, the responsibility for education was given to the provinces in the Constitution Act of 1867. There is no counterpart in Canada to the U.S. federal role in education. There is, however, a national coordinating role in education that is performed by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, but it is confined to a facilitating role for actions by provincial ministries inidividually or collectively.

School boards are established by the Province of Alberta, and they act with a great deal of autonomy within broad parameters established by the province. The Province provided 61% of the funds expended by school jurisdictions in 1989, and the remainder was obtained by school jurisdictions via local residential taxes. The Alberta school system serves approximately half a million students from Early Childhood to Grade 12. The largest number of these students are in publicly funded schools (97%) and the remainder in private school (3%). In total there are 143 school jurisdictions operating 1,524 public schools. There are also 134 private schools.

Background

Two primary beliefs influenced significantly the educational reform initiatives in Alberta: first, that education is a purposeful endeavor; and second, that a reaffirmation of the student as the central reason for educational efforts was required. To assist in ensuring that these two beliefs became operational, it was felt that a results-based approach to education must be fostered, and that it should permeate all levels in the educational system. Too much emphasis was placed on inputs and processes - a more balanced approach was required among inputs, processes, and results. Only by obtaining a better understanding of the consequences of educational efforts could real improvements to educational practices be obtained. Without good information on educational results, education would remain vulnerable to educational fads and interest group politics. Finally, there was a need to respond to the growing and legitimate demand for enhanced accountability for the achievement of demonstrable and relatively easily understood educational results.

In response to these concerns, a series of initiatives was implemented to modify the relationship between the department and the educational community. Alberta Education's goal was to establish desirable conditions that would assist school jurisdictions in providing **the best possible education to all Alberta students.** Alberta Education's framework for reform was established within the umbrella of provincial government policy.

The approach to educational reform comprised several phases: first, establishing general directions at the outset; second, building the infrastructure for reform; third, implementing changes; fourth, assessing the impacts of the changes; and finally, modifying policies and strategies as appropriate. Central to this approach was the department's ability to revise its strategy and implementation plans to take advantage of new opportunities as more information became available about what was possible to achieve. The process of change was expected to take eight to ten years to be fully realized.

After considerable discussion and assessment within Alberta Education of the provincial situation, four major components of reform were identified:

- the management and financing of education,
- the governance of education,
- the educational programs provided by the province, and
- unanticipated projects that supported the general direction of reform.

The general approach is summarized in Figure 1.

The components of reform were initiated at different times relative to the opportunities available. At one point, a large number of major projects operated simultaneously placing great pressure on the department and the external educational community. This strategy had the advantage of creating sufficient system momentum to move toward change. The concomitant disadvantage was that the tremendous pressure placed on the educational systems' resources to manage all the changes created a backlash against trying to accomplish too much too fast.

Underlying Guidelines

To assist in managing the tremendous pressures that built up occasionally, guidelines were gradually developed to provide a consistent referent point for stakeholders. These guidelines provided a sense of stability in a turbulent environment. They also provided a framework to assist in making decisions regarding what "means" (programs, policies, information, stakeholder roles, etc.) would best accomplish the intent of the reform efforts. Consequently, the guidelines were able to depoliticize the process enough to enable the reforms to continue through critical and difficult stages.

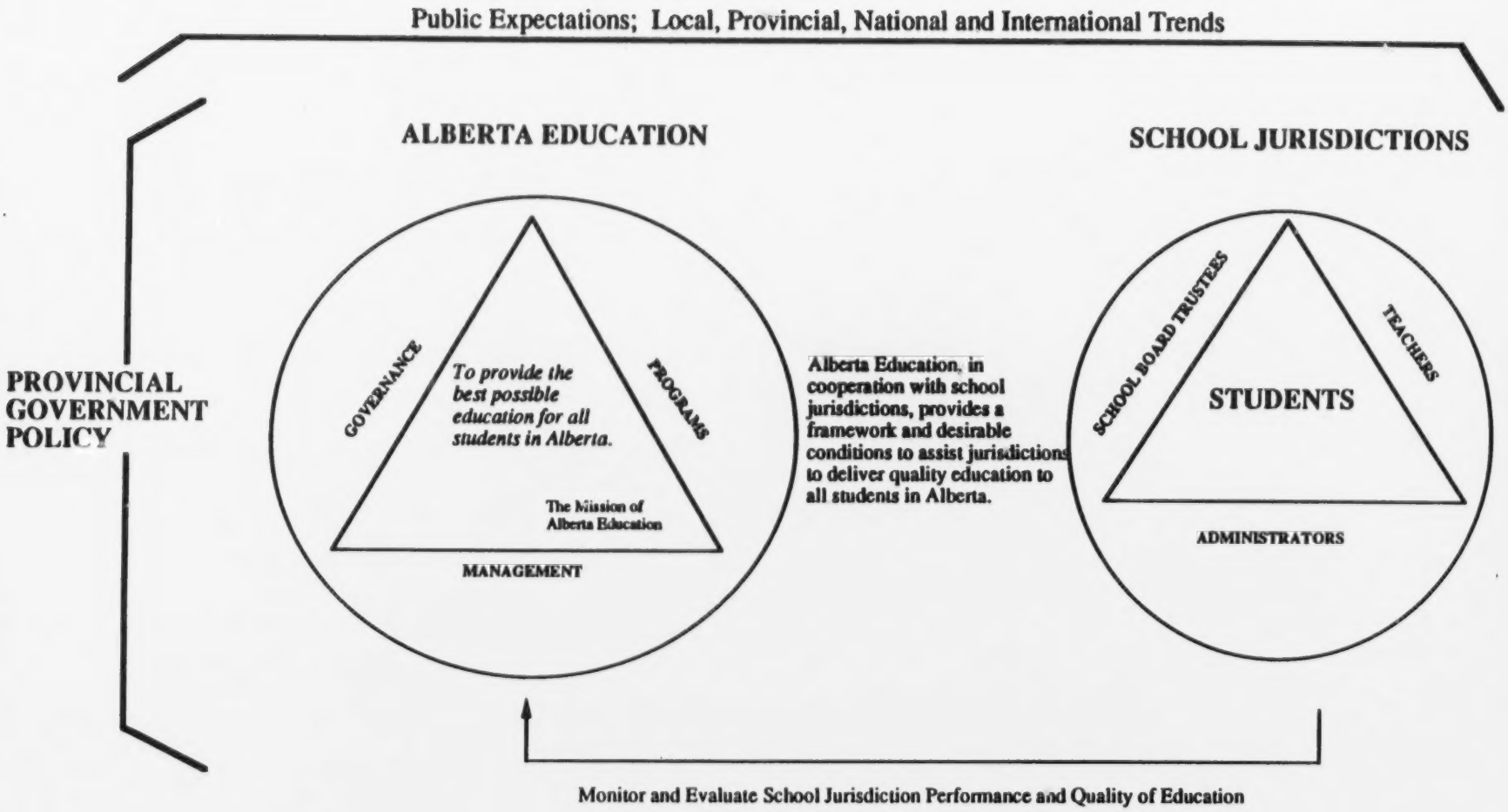
Public Expectations; Local, Provincial, National and International Trends
ALBERTA EDUCATION
SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT POLICY
GOVERNANCE
To provide the best possible education for all students in Alberta.
PROGRAMS
The Mission of Alberta Education
MANAGEMENT
Alberta Education, in cooperation with school jurisdictions, provides a framework and desirable conditions to assist jurisdictions to deliver quality education to all students in Alberta.
SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES
TEACHERS
STUDENTS
ADMINISTRATORS
Monitor and Evaluate School Jurisdiction Performance and Quality of Education

Figure 1: The Building Blocks of Reform and Improvement

The following guidelines were used to frame the reform efforts.

Students

- The student is the focus of all efforts in the educational enterprise. All decisions made in education must address the question, "How will this decision help to improve the education that students experience?"
- Instructional programs take into account the needs of the learner in a changing society, the nature of knowledge, and a desirable learning environment.
- Schooling, accessible to all Albertans, is the most efficient way of transmitting the required knowledge, skills and values to foster the advancement and survival of a democratic society (public education).
- Every student in Alberta has the right of access to a quality education which is consistent with the student's abilities and provides the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to fulfill personal goals and contribute to society as a whole (equity).
- Technology is used to enhance learning and to facilitate access to equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of ability, circumstance or location.
- Expectations must be established for students and progress measured by the degree of achievement of predetermined standards.
- Students progress on the basis of demonstrated competence.

Funding

- Provincial funding is, in the main, unconditional except for three general areas: capital (eg, school buildings), grants for transportation, and specific grants for meeting the special needs of children.

- Alberta Education encourages excellence, creativity and innovation at all levels while also being efficient and effective in its operations.

Shared Roles

- Education is a shared responsibility among Alberta Education, the family, schools, and other institutions.
- All those involved in making decisions about educational matters and those responsible for public funds spent on education must be accountable for their decisions.
- School jurisdictions and Alberta Education use the results of their monitoring and evaluation processes to make appropriate adjustments to the educational system.

School Jurisdictions

- The school has primary responsibility for the intellectual development of each student and for fostering the desire for lifelong, self-directed learning, in cooperation with the student, parents and community.
- School jurisdictions are accountable to the government and their local constituencies for the planning and results of education within provincially established policies. They are also responsible to the electorate for planning and programming, and for the achievement of educational results which meet the changing needs and expectations of students, parents and the community.
- School jurisdictions are responsible for the provision of educational programs and services to all resident students.
- Within standards and policies set by the provincial government, there should be opportunities for choosing among several alternative kinds of education. School jurisdictions, schools and teachers must have the flexibility to meet the unique needs of the communities and students they serve.

Alberta Education

- Alberta Education provides leadership by establishing overall policies, priorities and direction to education in the province while encouraging school jurisdiction flexibility.
- Alberta Education is responsible for implementing educational policies and standards, and for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the achievement of educational results.
- Alberta Education consults and cooperates with members of the community, and provides them with an opportunity to develop and assess policies and programs.

These guidelines came from three sources: the 1984 Management and Finance Plan, the 1988 School Act, and the 1985 Secondary Education Policy.

Results-Based Initiatives

A results-based educational approach focusses on the outcomes of the efforts (process) and resources (inputs) into the education of students. The process, inputs and context within which education occurs are not ignored — they are recognized as essential. But information on inputs, process and context are not sufficient. In the results-based approach, it is essential to know if all the efforts have resulted in student learning and other defined outcomes.

> *"Under the old conception ..., education was thought of as a process and system, effort and intention, investment and hope. To improve education meant to try harder, to engage in more activities, to magnify one's plans, to give people more services, and to become more efficient in delivering them.*
>
> *Under the new definition, now struggling to be born, education is the result achieved, the learning that takes root when the process has been effective. Only if the process succeeds and learning occurs will we say that education has happened. Absent evidence of such a result, there is no education — however many attempts have been made, resources deployed, or energies expended" (Finn Jr., 1990).*

This difference in perspective between education as a result or process is fundamental — it changes the way we view and assess the whole of education. We look at what students learn, the result, rather than just what activities they engage, the process.

The view taken in this paper is that it is not a choice between viewing education as a process or as a result. Education is viewed as a total system comprised of context, inputs, process and outcomes/results (McEwen, Zatko: 1989). The key is to balance our efforts on key attributes of the entire system. Focus on process only is unproductive. Focus on results only may be more productive, but it is essential also to gather and assess information on processes contributing to the desired result.

During the period of reform in Alberta discussed in this paper, a more balanced approach among inputs, processes and results was needed. Inputs and processes were firmly entrenched and required no further support. As a result, the tactic adopted was to place almost sole emphasis initially on the move toward results. It was hoped that by focusing on results, a balance of inputs, processes and results would eventually be achieved.

The approach employed was directed at working with all constituents of the educational system: Alberta Education, the central agencies of the provincial government, schools, teachers, trustees, superintendents, faculties of education, and other partners in education. A general direction instead of a detailed plan was established for moving toward a more results-based approach thus enabling the department to remain flexible in responding to opportunities as they arose. The shifting effects of the many projects under way were monitored and strategies and tactics adapted as required.

In such a dynamic, fast-paced and complex environment, the timeliness of responses and the ability to communicate effectively were paramount to maintaining a sustained and successful reform effort. At the same time, the fast-paced and sometimes volatile situation also increased the probability of communication and tactical mistakes. While some degree of coordination of internal and external efforts was considered necessary, much emphasis was placed on encouraging multiple and diverse projects in related areas. Reform, it was believed, was messy and not conducive to tight control. Diversity and even limited competition among similar projects could be beneficial. For individuals and agencies who "needed" to know the "specific blueprint" for the future, this lack of clarity of reform efforts was problematic. For example, some wondered what the real, hidden game plan was. Trust was an issue at the outset.

Several interrelated projects were developed in the areas of management, programs and governance. Figure 2 summarizes some of the key projects that were initiated over the period 1982-1990.

The following provides a brief overview of some of the projects identified in Figure 2.

YEAR \ AREA	Management	Programs	Governance
1982		Provincial Achievement Tests (Grades 3, 6 and 9)	
1983	Management and Finance Plan		
19[illegible]	School Jurisdiction Evaluation Policies, Annual Education Report	Provincial Diploma Examinations for Grade 12	School Act Review
1985	Province-wide monitoring and evaluation system of school system performance		
1986		Curriculum design specified demonstrable learning expectations/outcomes	
1987	Provincial Education Performance Standards		
1988	School Achievement Indicators Project		Criteria for assessing good teaching practice
1989	Educational Quality Indicators Project Educational Information Exchange Project Special Education Student Outcomes	High Needs Schools Program	
1990	School jurisdiction initiated local educational quality indicators Alberta Education Staff Appraisal System		CURRENT
1991	*First annual report card on the performance of the education system*	*Enhancement of provincial achievement tests*	*PLANNED*
1992	*Provincially sponsored forum on the status of implementation of educational quality indicators*		*Evaluation of Teachers Evaluation Policy* *Evaluation of impact of teacher excellence criteria on teacher evaluation*
1993			

Figure 2: Initiation of Key Events in Implementing Results-Based Education in Alberta

Management of Education

Under this component, several activities were initiated.

Management and Finance Plan (1983 - 1994)

In November 1983, an opportunity arose for political support from the provincial government for a new approach to the management and funding of education. After a series of discussions, approval from the provincial government was received December 21, 1983 for implementation of the Management and Finance Plan (MFP). It evolved from an emphasis on funding mechanisms to a more comprehensive approach to the management of education in the province (Alberta Education, 1984).

> *The focus of educational management under MFP has shifted from regulatory, pre-audit provincial control of educational inputs, to a system of shared responsibility in the planning, budgeting, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of educational outputs and results. The shift in educational management will result in greater accountability at all levels, focusing on the quality of results achieved by the educational system. Grants, on the other hand, will not be the primary driving force behind our educational system, but will be a support system for the educational management process with the focus being placed on obtaining the highest educational value for each educational dollar spent (Duke, 1985, p. 7).*

A ten-year plan was developed to guide MFP implementation. The immediate goals included:

- Improved information on the results of educational programming available to everyone.
- Increased responsiveness of the entire educational system to the changing needs of students and parents.

- Increased local responsibility, autonomy, flexibility and discretion by school jurisdictions over the use of provincial funds to meet local needs, within policy directions established by the province.

- Increased accountability of both Alberta Education and school jurisdictions to the electorate.

- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in the use of limited public funds for the provision of education, with the focus on providing benefits directly to students.

- Enhanced partnership among school organizations and Alberta Education in the planning and evaluation of educational results.

- Enhanced equity of educational opportunities (Alberta Education, 1989, p.1).

In January 1984, the Deputy Minister appointed an internal Task Force to implement MFP. Thirty committees were formed with about 20% of departmental staff participating directly in reshaping provincial management and financing structures and processes. An extensive communications and consultation process with school jurisdictions was a key part of the implementation process. The breadth of MFP is illustrated in that there were 103 projects once full implementation was under way.

Examples of outcomes to date related to the results component of MFP are:

- school jurisdictions developed and implemented mandatory evaluation policies for student, teacher, program, school and school system evaluation;

- Alberta Education developed a province-wide monitoring and evaluation system for assessing educational quality and school jurisdiction performance; and

- school jurisdictions report to the public annually the results of their efforts on education provided to students.

As implementation of MFP continued through to 1990, the concepts underlying MFP became more widely accepted and gradually the basic management infrastructure was established. Several spin-off projects were initiated and existing complementary projects were accelerated. A significant group of projects emerged that dealt with educational standards and indicators.

Educational Standards And Indicators

From 1983 to 1989, a series of important projects was launched to support the results-based approach to education. To a limited degree, all of the projects duplicate efforts in some areas. This apparent surface "messiness" in the approach to reform in Alberta was mentioned earlier.

Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Examinations

In 1982, Alberta Education introduced the Achievement Testing Program at grades 3, 6, and 9. In 1984, compulsory Provincial Diploma Examinations at the grade 12 level were reinstated as a requirement for high school graduation.

Approximately 27,000 students annually take grade 12 provincially administered diploma examinations in two different English courses, social studies, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. Approximately 90,000 students took achievement tests in Alberta in 1987/88 (Alberta Education, 1989).

Consideration is being given to modifying the grades 3, 6 and 9 Achievement Testing Program by changing from testing the four core subjects (social studies, language arts, science and mathematics) on a four-year cycle to an annual cycle based on a matrix sampling design. One purpose of this project is to provide criterion-referenced tests that will permit longitudinal comparisons of student performance. Increasing public

awareness and demand for information on student results haved fuelled and will continue to fuel the need for improved information on student performance.

Provincial Educational Performance Standards (Phase One: 1987 - 1991)

To follow through on the result-based component of the Management and Finance Plan, Alberta Education developed draft educational quality performance standards for the province. Twelve standards have been drafted for discussion. They are organized into four clusters: student outcomes, equity, the educational delivery system, and client satisfaction. These standards represent a balance between process and results-based perspectives.

The development of draft standards required two years of internal, and often very heated, discussions as to the approach to be taken and the standards to be used before the document was tabled with school jurisdictions and other stakeholders for discussion.

This project has used a top-down approach to initiate discussions with stakeholders. Now that the initial round of discussions has occurred with major stakeholders, a more collaborative approach has been taken to refine the draft standards and to develop mutually acceptable implementation plans, including determining how the standards will be used and by whom.

One small but significant example of the type of cooperation that is emerging is that the Alberta Teachers' Association has taken the proposed provincial standards and is polling its membership to rank order the standards. This type of information will prove invaluable when the next round of discussions occurs on the second draft of the standards. Another example of cooperation is that a stakeholder technical committee has been established to review the draft provincial standards. Participants will include teachers, trustees, superintendents and Alberta Education staff.

School Achievement Indicators Project

In September 1988, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) approved in principle a three-phase plan for the development of national education indicators. This School Achievement Indicators Project will provide a Canadian information base that will enable provincial ministries and departments to assess the performance of their school programs in comparison with Canada-wide standards and the performance of other provinces and territories. Phase I will describe participation rates, retention rates, and graduation rates. Phase II will explore the feasibility of developing indicators of satisfaction with school systems. Phase III will address the literacy and numeracy skills of 13 and 16-year old students across Canada. CMEC approved the plans to proceed with the first two phases (CMEC, 1989). Alberta Education is the lead department for this activity with coordination of the other provinces provided by the CMEC Secretariat.

To date, little of this project has been shared with stakeholders. Steps are being taken to deal with this situation. For example, an Educational Indicators Forum with membership of all stakeholders is being formed. This national project will be one of the agenda items discussed at the Forum.

Educational Quality Indicators Project

To balance the top-down approach used to initiate discussions of provincial standards, Alberta Education initiated a three-year partnership project with twelve school jurisdictions in Alberta. The purpose of the project is to have each school jurisdiction develop a set of educational indicators to fit its particular needs and situation. Participants are members of a provincial committee which will discuss, interpret and recommend directions to Alberta Education in achieving results-based education.

School jurisdictions are provided with financial and advisory resources by the province to develop their own set of indicators. These local indicators do not require provincial approval. Reasons for this project include: to empower local leaders to be in a better position to discuss the validity of the draft

provincial standards; to assess the degree of overlap and complementarity between the provincial and local indicators; and to assess the practical issues of implementing educational quality standards at the local level.

Special Education Student Outcomes (Phase One: 1990 - 1991)

This project is chaired by a stakeholder steering committee to develop student outcomes for students who are either limited in some capacity or who are gifted. A collaborative model is being employed from the start which stresses the need for stakeholder input and consensus on the standards that will be developed and implemented. Three clusters of standards are being considered: student outcomes, post-school outcomes, and client satisfaction.

Other Projects

Related projects have also been initiated by Alberta Education.

Educational Information Exchange

This project is establishing a province-wide student registry system to track students in the province. At present, a comprehensive data base is not available to implement and monitor the standards that are being developed. This project is fundamental to the results-based thrust.

The Educational Information Exchange System is being developed in a collaborative manner with school jurisdictions. The cooperation has been very positive, and Alberta Education has been able to deal with almost all of the data needs and other concerns raised by the school jurisdictions.

Regional Office Evaluations

Every year, about 200 school system and school evaluations are undertaken by Alberta Education's Regional Offices of Education. Prior to the Management and Finance Plan, the majority of these evaluations focused on processes rather than results. Gradually, the emphasis is shifting to more of a focus on results, but progress is slow. The ability to be successful in this area is dependent on those other projects that will develop standards in the province.

Staff Performance Systems

Alberta Education staff performance assessment systems are being changed to match the department's overall approach to results-based management. Internal operations and behaviors must match the external rhetoric and provincial expectations for school systems in order for the reform strategy to maintain its integrity, and also to develop a synergy that should come about when the internal operations of the department match and reinforce the external expectations for school jurisdictions.

Facts and Figures

This document is one of the major publications through which Alberta Education communicates information to the educational community and other publics. In the 1989-90 edition, the data were organized into three sections: the context for education in Alberta, the inputs/process elements of education, and the outcomes of educational efforts. This format signals the way in which all future data from the department will be organized, and it sets the stage for a new level and nature of discussion of education in the province.

Programs

The major effects have been in the way that curriculum design is approached and how new educational programs are designed.

Curriculum Design

The Secondary Education Policy established the principles for secondary education in Alberta (Alberta Education, 1985 and 1987). The implementation of the policy was affected by the results-based approach and a greater degree of emphasis was placed on describing the specific learner expectations in Alberta's curriculum. Specific learner expectations are being articulated for the concepts, skills and attitudes that students are expected to develop in a particular program.

The implementation of this policy has not been easy for a variety of technical and political reasons. For example, agreeing on specific and demonstrable learner expectations

for any one course has proven to be more difficult than originally anticipated. As well, there still is no consensus in the department that developing specific learner expectations is the right direction to take for every subject area. Specific learner expectations for mathematics are considered acceptable but may not be the right approach for ethics and fine arts. It has become clear that there is divided opinion as to how to develop curriculum.

High Needs Schools Program

In 1989, Alberta Education established a special fund to address the challenges faced by high needs students in Alberta's two largest cities. Significant numbers of students attending school in Edmonton and Calgary are disadvantaged educationally, socially, and economically. These students lack English-language skills, have low levels of self-esteem, and lack proper nutrition and health care. These problems hinder their success at school. The High Need Schools Program will focus on schools in Edmonton and Calgary whose students have the greatest need. The significant feature of this program is that Alberta Education, in cooperation with the participating school jurisdictions, designed standards by which to assess the program's success at the end of a three-year pilot phase. School jurisdictions have discretion over which programs or means will be used to achieve the desired results. The diversity of approaches used by school jurisdictions will provide for a rich discussion regarding the most effective means to achieve similar results.

Governance

There are two key initiatives: a new School Act and the Council On Alberta Teaching Standards (COATS).

School Act

The former School Act was introduced in 1970. A revision of the School Act was initiated because demographic, social and economic conditions had changed dramatically. It was necessary to restructure the governance system to more closely match the principles of the Management and Finance Plan, and because there were several emerging concerns (eg, equity

of educational opportunity, role of parents, the role of private schools and home schooling, rights of students, and disputes resolution). As could be expected, the School Act review process engendered intense discussion and debate, and was closely covered in the media. Four years after the review process was initiated, the School Act was proclaimed on December 31, 1988.

The 1988 School Act focuses on the student. While the 1970 School Act dealt mostly with how schools and school jurisdictions are managed, the new School Act reinforces that the fundamental purpose of education is to ensure that students learn. A second important feature of the School Act is that it is based on five clear principles: *access to quality education; equity; flexibility; responsiveness, and accountability* (Alberta Education, 1987). The School Act provides the legislative framework that reinforces the results-based thrust of the provincial government.

The implementation of the new School Act is well under way. To date, some of its impacts related to results-based initiatives are:

- School jurisdictions have implemented parent advisory councils to improve communication and accountability to parents.

- A provincial appeals tribunal is in place to hear the cases of parents disputing school board educational decisions about their child.

- The roles of the key participants in education have been clearly defined thereby providing the basis for increased accountability for educational results.

Council On Alberta Teaching Standards

The Council on Alberta Teaching Standards (COATS) was announced by the then Minister of Education March 25, 1985. Part of the Council's mandate is to advise the Minister on: programs for the preparation of teachers and requirements for

Alberta teaching certificates; conditions under which suspension or cancellation of certificates is justified; and policy, practice and outcomes in the area of teacher evaluation.

The Council has eleven members, six of whom are certificated Alberta teachers. Four members are from the Alberta School Trustees' Association, Alberta Education, Universities, and the Conference of Alberta School Superintendents. One member is from the public at large.

The significant contributions of the Council to the results-based thrust have been to:

- establish practice review procedures and assessment criteria for good teaching practice, and based on these, have heard a number of teacher disciplinary cases; and

- establish a Teacher Excellence Award Program, which, with the help of all school jurisdictions across the province, annually select about 20 of Alberta's excellent teachers based on the criteria for good teaching practice.

The Council has included student outcomes as a key component of the criteria for assessing good teaching practice, a significant step in moving toward a more results-based approach to education.

Status of Implementation: Some Observations

Moving toward a more results-based approach to education and management has not been easy. A tremendous amount of energy has been devoted to establishing an understanding of and a commitment to a more balanced approach to inputs, processes and results. Tangible benefits from a few of the initial pilot projects are now apparent. The next four years should see an acceleration of the implementation of the results-based initiatives. Some of the reasons for this observation are outlined below.

Top-Down And Collaborative Approaches

At the outset of the reform started in 1982, Alberta Education aggressively pursued change from the top. Even though there was a tremendous amount of discussion and consultation with stakeholders, the department made it clear that the Minister of Education would establish the agenda for reform and make the final decisions. Subsequently, the 'new style and rhetoric' of the Minister, Deputy Minister, and other key Alberta Education senior staff resulted in stakeholders' viewing the process as top-down. This made change more difficult, especially because the reform being discussed was perceived as a change in deeply held values.

The pattern of initiating reform has shifted gradually from a top-down approach from Alberta Education in 1982 toward a more collaborative approach with stakeholders in 1990. The general shape of this evolution is outlined in Figure 3. The phases are:

- top-down initiatives from Alberta Education,
- mixed top-down initiatives from Alberta Education and collaboration between Alberta Education and stakeholders,
- collaborative projects, and
- stakeholder-initiated reform projects, perhaps supported by Alberta Education in their initial stages.

A dynamic tension exists between and among the various approaches in Alberta. It will likely remain this way. However,

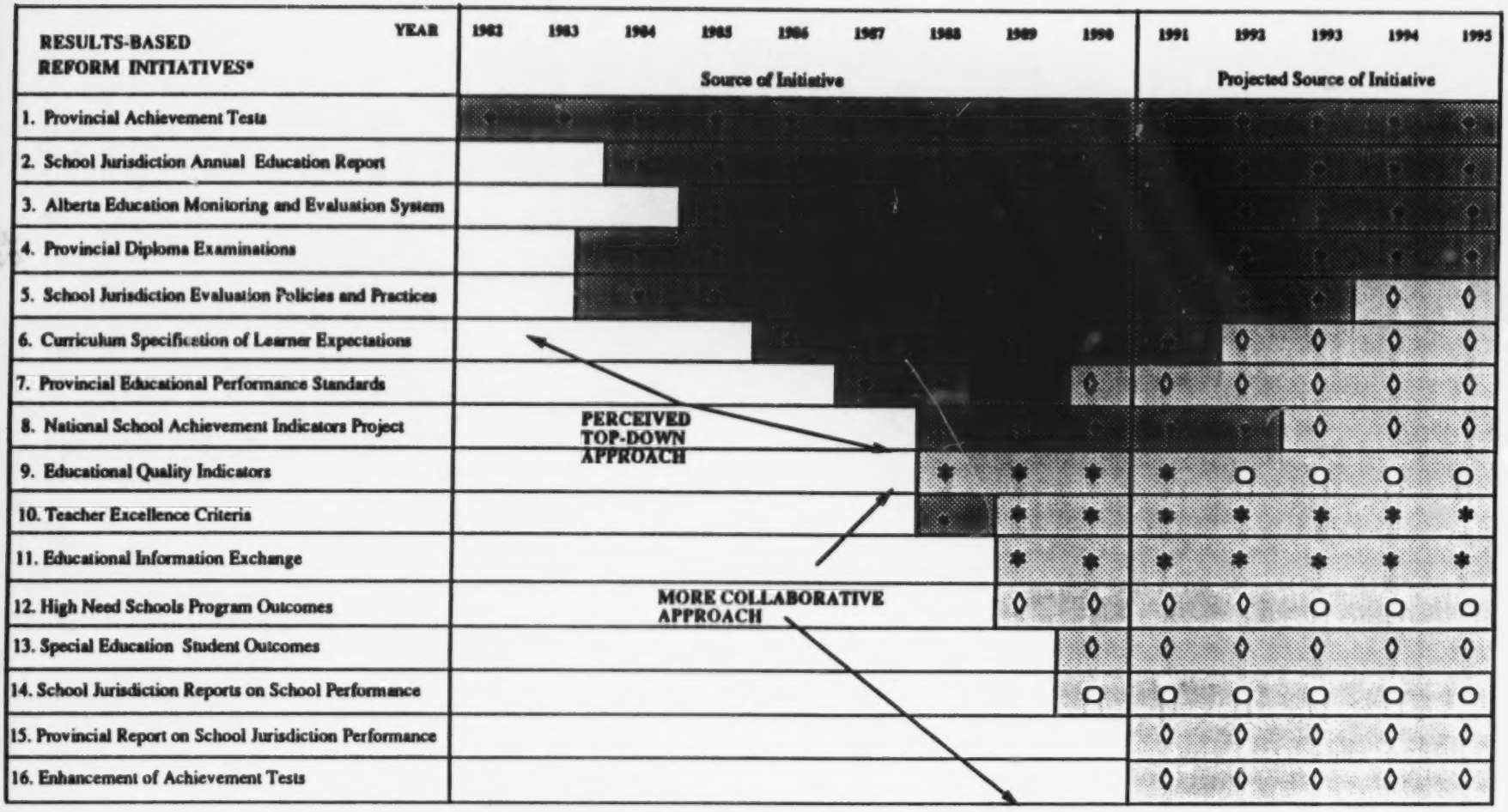
RESULTS-BASED REFORM INITIATIVES*
YEAR
1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990
Source of Initiative
1991 1992 1993 1994 1995
Projected Source of Initiative
1. Provincial Achievement Tests
2. School Jurisdiction Annual Education Report
3. Alberta Education Monitoring and Evaluation System
4. Provincial Diploma Examinations
5. School Jurisdiction Evaluation Policies and Practices
6. Curriculum Specification of Learner Expectations
7. Provincial Educational Performance Standards
8. National School Achievement Indicators Project
9. Educational Quality Indicators
10. Teacher Excellence Criteria
11. Educational Information Exchange
12. High Need Schools Program Outcomes
13. Special Education Student Outcomes
14. School Jurisdiction Reports on School Performance
15. Provincial Report on School Jurisdiction Performance
16. Enhancement of Achievement Tests
PERCEIVED TOP-DOWN APPROACH
MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH
Key: Primarily top-down from Alberta Education
Mixed top-down/collaborative
Collaborative Initiative
Stakeholder Initiative

Figure 3: Current and Projected Sources of Reform Initiatives

there will be more of a balance among the various approaches to reform. Consequently, the tension should become more productive.

Interestingly, a few school jurisdictions and other stakeholders are now saying that Alberta Education is moving too slowly. These stakeholders have accepted the results-based thrust and are moving rapidly and independently toward implementation. They want Alberta Education to increase the pace. Additionally, the proactive position by these key stakeholders is broadening the network of reform initiators more evenly throughout Alberta stakeholders. This is building a broader reform base that is less dependent on Alberta Education staff and support, and bodes well for the potential of the reform initiatives to continue more independently of Alberta Education.

System Inertia

The difficulty of moving from an input and process orientation was underestimated. For example, most Alberta educators come from a process orientation. Little academic and virtually no practical training in results-based education and management has occurred. As well, the majority seem to remember how "results" have been used previously "to get rid of people, not to improve education for students".

The "people" issue is compounded by current hiring practices and staff performance appraisal and reward systems. These tend to lag behind reform efforts and reinforce old patterns rather than the desired behaviors and skills required to implement the reform goals. For example, the Alberta Education staff performance appraisal system still reinforces a process orientation rather than a results orientation. This is changing, but slowly. It is vital to change in order to have the behaviors of Alberta Education staff match the rhetoric to school jurisdictions that more of a focus on results is important.

To date, very little progress has been made in the preservice and inservice areas to help staff become well prepared for implementing a more balanced approach to inputs, processes and results. For example, no teacher preparation courses exist at the university level dealing with results-based education.

No teacher professional development activities exist in this area. And Alberta Education has not developed courses to help its staff develop the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the results-based approach. This gap has proved to be a hindrance to reform efforts; it has slowed it down. The absence of a supportive preservice and inservice infrastructure to support the reform efforts creates long-term negative consequences. If you ask/require people to act/perform in a certain way and the majority of them do not, then they will either get rid of the reform initiators and revert to the status quo, or they will leave and new staff will have to be hired. Neither consequence is acceptable.

The Test Of Time

It was anticipated initially that several results-based projects would have been implemented in ten years. Clearly demonstrable changes in behaviors were expected. It now appears that significant observable changes will not occur for some twelve to fifteen years. Progress has been made, but it has been slower than anticipated.

This prolonged time frame for real change to occur places high demands on the consistency and tenacity of the reform initiative. The longer it takes for the "vision" to be achieved, the greater the probability that the leaders will lose either interest or the energy required to foster reform. Also, leaders could change and a new vision will be placed on the centre stage of reform. As one senior staff member said in 1982: " Gary, be careful of becoming too closely associated with the Management and Finance Plan (MFP) and the new Deputy Minister. MFP will come and go, the Deputy Minister and the Minister will come and go, but we will remain; the system will remain and the status quo will reassert itself again".

The durability of a reform initiative is one of the key ways the system, the status quo, tests the reformers. Either the reformers last or they are replaced. In Alberta, a critical core of the original reformers has remained since 1982 so that the ideology of the power base and the consistency of the vision no longer seem to be major issues. The issue now appears to be "how fast and in what ways will the results orientation be implemented".

This attitudinal shift is critical. For instance, more champions are now prepared to step forward and propose results-based initiatives that they know fit into a consistent and enduring vision supported by a reasonably stable provincial power base. Consequently, the resources devoted to shifting the balance from inputs and processes to results increases exponentially and rapidly. When 10% to 20% of the 100 superintendents, 1,240 trustees, 1,660 principals, and 27,000 teachers are devoted to the results side of the equation, then the reform thrust should have achieved "lift off". In Alberta, this has not occurred yet, but it is getting closer.

Maintenance Of Sustained Reform Efforts

After the provincial student achievement testing program and provincial diploma examinations were instituted in 1982 and 1984, respectively, the results theme started to loss impetus between 1984 and 1987. The department's energies were devoted to other major activities such as the Secondary Education Review. However, in 1987 a series of new projects was initiated which prevented the results-based theme from going the way of most reform efforts - to the bookshelf. The department was reorganized in 1987 and many senior managers opted for an early retirement program. New people with new ideas and energies emerged to initiate a number of new projects.

With the establishment of new projects and a move toward more collaboration between Alberta Education and stakeholders, the attainment of results-based education became realistic again.

Complexity And Coordination

The complexity in moving toward a more balanced approach among inputs, processes and results has been underestimated and compounded by insufficient internal coordination in Alberta Education. For example, Alberta Education moved from five results-based projects in 1985 to sixteen plus projects in 1989. Because internal departmental coordination was not a high priority, a number of issues have emerged. These include different conceptual models and definitions; unclear accountability centres in the department to resolve issues

raised by stakeholders; and duplication of efforts in a time of fiscal restraint.

Simultaneously, the increasing number of results-based projects facilitated the development of more and varied stakeholder alliances. The network of support increased. A richness of thought, approaches and potential solutions rose to the surface. It was messy, yes, but it also was creative, and significant action was being generated again.

A significant challenge remains to reduce the complexity and implement one or two easily understood Alberta Education/ stakeholder approaches to results-based education. If more coordination does not occur, Alberta Education runs the risk of establishing too many new tests, surveys and other mechanisms that would amount to a new paper deluge on school personnel that would have negative consequences. But more importantly, Alberta Education runs the risk of dissipating the department's and stakeholders' efforts. It is now time to focus efforts on areas where tangible differences can be made soon.

Scope of Reform

Within the context of results-based educational reform, the interest demonstrated in the reform initiatives by provincial government central agencies was surprising. The interest runs along the following lines: "If education can implement a results-based approach, and survive politically, than we (Treasury, Auditor General, etc.) have a strong case to require other government agencies to conform".

While this interest in Alberta Education's initiative was welcomed, it put increased pressure on the department to succeed. Extensive annual audits of Alberta Education were performed by the central government agencies to assess progress. These audits were useful in that they forced Alberta Education to report on the status of implementing a more results-based approach to education and public sector management. Status reports were prepared annually for Alberta Education and they were used during the audits of the department by the central agencies. Therefore, internal momentum for the project was sustained during periods when the rate of progress was dropping.

Trust and Collegiality

In Alberta, public opinion polls have demonstrated continually that the public does not have a high degree of trust of government (Alberta Education, 1989, pp. 66-69). Additionally, before 1982, there was a tradition of achieving consensus between Alberta Education and stakeholders before provincial decisions were made and implemented. This tradition changed. The new Deputy Minister in 1982 suggested that although stakeholder consensus was desirable, he would make a required decision if consensus was not attainable within a reasonable period of time. Consequently, the issue of trust became paramount. It has taken eight years to reduce the anxieties created by this Deputy Minister's approach and the scope of reform being discussed. The perception of a lack of consistency on the part of provincial politicians toward education was also a major contributor to the level of anxiety in Alberta during this period.

At present, there appears to be a level of restored mutual confidence and trust among stakeholders toward Alberta Education. From 1982 to 1990, the three strong and capable Ministers of Education who held reasonably consistent policies have helped significantly to improve stakeholder confidence, as has the move by Alberta Education toward more collaboration. It is paramount that the level of cooperation be enhanced during the operational or implementation stages of various projects. In this way, stakeholders have significant input into the educational standards that will eventually be adopted by the province, and in how the standards will be used (including the protocol for interpreting and acting on the analysis). The quality of the results likely will be improved substantially.

Means and Results

Several issues emerged relative to the distinction between means and results. Alberta Education's approach initially was to define the vision, the goal and desired results and try to convince departmental staff and stakeholders that this was the right thing to do and in the best interest of students. The means to achieve the result were less important to Alberta Education's senior management. Any effective mean or means, given that it is legal and moral, was acceptable to the department. This position apparently was contrary to past practices which

tended toward debating the means even though the desired result was not clearly defined. These discussions provided an appearance of productivity; unfortunately, they tended to deal inadequately with the real issues and problems. The apparent irreverence for the means did not win any popularity contests.

The focus on vision and results was easy to make speeches about, but its practice was another story. For example, the practice meant that different group processes, different agendas, different discussions and analyses were required. Discussing a grant form or formula is generally much easier than discussing the reason and educational purpose behind a grant. Likewise, assuming that everything is fine because there are no major complaints from stakeholders is easier than having a third party assess the attainment of clearly specified objectives. Also, people generally do not appreciate comments about "their process and operations" unless they control the agenda. The ability of Alberta Education staff and stakeholders to be more honest with each other and to find ways that were culturally accepted has been a challenge. Progress is being made, but it is slow.

Finally, it has been difficult to reach a common understanding of the term "results" and how it will be applied in education; for example, in program evaluations, in teacher evaluations, in designing learner expectations in the curriculum, in developing educational standards and indicators, and in Alberta Education staff appraisal systems. At present, there is no common agreement in the province on this matter. Progress is being made, but slowly.

A Direction Versus A Blueprint

The absence of a detailed plan or blueprint for reform and how it is to be achieved, has proved to be a significant communication barrier. The concept of strategic planning as providing a general direction or vision was not well appreciated by Alberta Education staff and stakeholders; a more operational type of linear planning was the accepted norm. The absence of a detailed plan was generally interpreted as Alberta Education trying to hide its real intentions. Something was really planned and the province was not willing to say what is was, therefore, the real plan was hidden.

Communications

There were communication needs that were not being met. People wanted information, meetings, papers, and then more information, meetings and discussions and then more again. There has been a seemingly insatiable appetite for information and discussion. In part, this demand for information was stimulated because of the issue of trust mentioned earlier. If stakeholders kept asking for more information, maybe the real hidden Alberta Education plan would be discovered.

This is a complex area which is still puzzling. It still is a critical area in the implementation process. Now that there is more collaboration on a consistent basis, there seems to be a more relaxed atmosphere and more trust since the reform initiative has lasted for the past eight years. How Alberta Education communicates its planning efforts will either remain a critical barrier or become a stepping stone to progress. Good communication is a prerequisite to assist in bridging the gap between opposing issues. It is worth a lot of attention by the reformers.

Blood, Sweat and Tears

The degree and extent of energy required by change agents was underestimated. The move to a more balanced perspective among inputs, processes and results represented a fundamental shift in values. There was no great wave of volunteers in the early stages to assist the reformers. Administrative delays in getting equipment, and the allocation of minimal and sometimes inadequate human resources were common. This meant that the reformers spent incredibly long hours doing basic analysis, planning, coordination, and so on to maintain the momentum. Several reformers broke under the pressure over the course of the last eight years.

Because of the pace and fundamental nature of the change being undertaken, tremendous pressure was placed on existing alliances, on personal friendships and on career opportunities. The reformers paid a price for instituting and following through on the proposed changes. Change, even with extensive consultation, has resulted in personal and organizational wounds that will take time to heal; but heal they will. Change is not antiseptic. Some of it hurts. Reformers must really believe in what they are proposing because they will pay a price for initiating change; they must be prepared to and be capable of absorbing that cost.

Conclusion

Efforts to achieve a more balanced approach among inputs, processes and results represent a major shift in Alberta value systems, programs, planning, information systems, reporting procedures, and the language of discussions. Maintaining the reform initiative has required educators and politicians to remain committed to reform goals over a long period of time, sometimes under extreme pressure to back off. This initial assessment of the progress toward achieving a more balanced approach among inputs, processes and results leads to the conclusion that tangible and significant deliverables are "around the corner" in the next two to four years. But the resolve and ability of the status quo to return rapidly should not be underestimated should a few strategic errors in the reform efforts be made. However, it is suggested that the reform initiatives are starting ***to create a new status quo*** which will represent a new set of values, including being a more friendly system that is more open to fresh ideas from any source that could help students. At the same time, the new status quo will be a tough, demanding system because of the rigor that good information on results will bring to the decision making process. The educational system is starting to internalize these new values. The agenda for education has changed, and the infrastructure for reform has been built and it remains solidly in place.

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